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Statement submitted by International Federation for Family Development, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Implications of the gender gap: a double "taxation" for women

The unequal distribution of unpaid care work between women and men represents an infringement of women's rights, their enjoyment of social protection systems and a brake on their economic empowerment. We argue that gender inequality in unpaid care work is the missing link that influences gender gaps in labor outcomes. The gender gap in unpaid care work has significant implications for women's ability to actively take part in the labor market and the type/quality of employment opportunities available to them [MIRANDA, 2011].

Time is a limited resource, which is divided between labor and leisure, productive and reproductive activities, paid and unpaid work. Every minute more that a woman spends on unpaid care work represents one minute less that she could be potentially spending on market-related activities or investing in her educational and vocational skills [FERRANT, 2014].

Unpaid care activities constitute a time and energy-consuming occupation that limits women's access to the labor market, relegating them to low-income and insecure employment. In countries where women spend a large amount of time on unpaid care and there is a large gender gap in time spent, the gender gap in hourly wages is also higher.

Unpaid care work entails a systemic transfer of hidden subsidies to the rest of the economy that go unrecognized, imposing a systematic time-tax on women throughout their life cycle [ANTONOPOULOS, 2009]. Caregiving is a complex activity, which requires among other physical and emotional skills, empathy, patience, dedication and effort. The result for those who do it is frequently exhaustion and, at times even illness [SILVERA, 2010].

Globally, an increase in girls' education and women's paid work means a decrease in the supply of unpaid work. Dependency is the fourth pillar of the Welfare State [SILVERA, 2010]. Women bear greater responsibility for unpaid care than men. Prevailing gender norms mean that women and girls undertake the bulk of unpaid care work such as looking after and educating children, looking after older family members, caring for the sick, preparing food, cleaning, and collecting water and fuel.

The socially prescribed and entrenched gender roles that denote women and girls as care providers can undermine their rights, limit their opportunities, capabilities and choices, and so impede their empowerment. Prevailing gender norms mean that, across all societies, women and girls undertake the bulk of unpaid care work such as looking after and educating children, looking after older family members, caring for the sick, preparing food, cleaning, and collecting water and fuel. This unequal burden of unpaid care undermines women and girls' rights (to decent work, to education, to health, to rest and leisure), limits their opportunities and, therefore, impedes their economic empowerment. It hinders women from seeking employment and income, which in turn holds them back economically.

The role of fathers

While there is a growing body of evidence about the role of fathers in children's lives, there are also knowledge gaps, and the quality of evidence varies. The labor force status is an important determinant of the time parents devote to childcare. Both [illegible] has been made to capture evidence about the positive influences of fathers on child development and well-being, it is pertinent to note that studies to date have more

often focused on the negative impacts of poor or absent fathering on children [WOOD & LAMBIN, 2013].

Most fathers aspire to share care-giving equally with their spouse/partner, but often are unable to bring this desire to reality. Fathers need time to develop parenting skills, but they don't have it. The fact that men don't bear children is obviously an unchangeable biological fact. The fact that men don't rear children is not. People are not born with the gene that teaches them all they need to know to be effective parents – neither women nor men. From the first days and weeks after childbirth, many (we hope most) women have the opportunity to spend time with their children, which facilitates both bonding with their newborn and the development of competencies as new parents. In contrast, few men are provided with an opportunity to spend significant time with their young children [HARRINGTON, 2011].

Unpaid work is also interlinked with the position individuals occupy in paid work because:

- It shapes the ability, duration and types of paid work that can be undertaken;
- It reduces the exercise of "voice" over decision-making and ability to accumulate savings and assets;
- In many societies, it is viewed as outside its socioeconomic dimensions and contributions;
- It is presumed for workers who are unskilled, with low pay, slender options for promotion and scant social protection.

Age is also a determinant of unpaid work, albeit with a smaller quantitative impact. The frequency of involvement first increases, then reaches a maximum before decreasing [MCCLOUGHAN, 2011]. The turning points pertaining mostly to women are:

- The mid-40s in the case of caring for and educating children;
- The late 40s in respect of cooking and housework;
- The early 50s for caring for elderly/disabled relatives.

Not only are women more involved in unpaid work, also the kind of activities in which they engage differs from their male counterparts. The most typical male tasks in the household are construction and repair work where women's involvement is limited, both in terms of participation and the amount of time they devote to the task. Men also devote slightly more time to gardening and pet care, but their participation rates in these activities are more or less equal to those of women. Tasks that have traditionally been thought of 'women's work' (e.g. cooking and cleaning) continue to be primarily performed by women. In the countries surveyed, 82% of women prepare meals on an average day, while only 44% of men do. Also, the average time spent by women on cooking is four times the time spent by men [MIRANDA, 2011].

As the reasons for unpaid work inequalities are multi-layered, there need to be distinct policy interventions to effectively remedy their negative impacts for different groups of women. Work-family reconciliation policies must be tailored accordingly.

From "shadow" to formal

[illegible] work [illegible]

Home care services form part of "white jobs" together with healthcare services and residential care activities, while housework services are at the border of this category.

Demand for care and household services is expected to increase due to an important trend on ageing in all Member States, combined with the expected decline of the number of potential carers within the family circle.

Rather than asking which type of State is best for women performing unpaid work, "we will attempt to make some observations that help contextualize their potential effects within diverse frameworks and policy spaces. If a country is facing underemployment and unemployment, and is willing to engage in public work programs, we need to identify (from a gender point of view) the interventions that can ameliorate burdens on women; if social cash transfers are used to improve human development indicators, it is useful to investigate how and when they are also helpful in addressing unpaid care work. When universal provisioning is a viable option, we need to ensure that policies are mindful of existing inequalities in paid and unpaid work" [ANTONOPOULOS, 2009].

In policy debates in many Member States, personal and household services are often mentioned as a possible answer to the following issues:

- Better work-life balance, achieved through increased externalization of daily tasks carried out at home as well as of child and elderly care. Accessible and affordable care services are also an important precondition for increasing female participation in the labor market.
- Creation of job opportunities for the relatively low-skilled, in particular as far as housework services are concerned, at a low cost for public finance by encouraging the provision of housework services in the formal economy rather than in the shadow economy. Job creation is also a factor in considering the cost of different options for long-term care.
- Improvement in the quality of care, thanks to a work-force having the right skills and benefiting from good working conditions, subject to quality controls on the service providers.

Given the foreseeable impact of demographic evolution on our societies, European labor markets need to become more inclusive and employment rate needs to rise. Personal and household services offer significant opportunities in this respect, allowing work-life balance to be improved, productivity to be increased and undeclared work to be brought into the official labor market [EU Commission Staff Working Document on exploiting the employment potential of the personal and household services, 2012]. When related to a country's development level, country cross-sectional data suggest that demographic factors and public policies tend to exercise a much larger impact.

One of the "solutions" for better reconciliation of work with family responsibilities involves more paid employment in caring, but the conditions of work and employment in these jobs often leave much to be desired. Undervaluation of paid care work goes hand in hand with lack of recognition of unpaid care work, which is seen as natural and not requiring skills.

Female migration in this context has significant impacts both in the South and the North. In the receiving countries, the employment of female immigrants represents an individual household's solution to the needs of balancing family and labor market work. [ANTONOPOULOS, 2009]

Family members have always been the mainstay for providing care to aging and other relatives or friends who need assistance with everyday living. Yet family

Policy recommendations

1. Recognize and communicate the value of work-family balance in the economy and in society.

2. Develop, provide and communicate comprehensive well-resourced and flexible parental leave entitlements throughout the life course of the family and in periods of transition.

3. Support, promote and communicate part-time working arrangements according to parental choice by ensuring non-discriminatory practices towards parents in the labor market. Promote skill development and learning systems throughout the life course of the family and in periods of transition to facilitate parents re-entering the labor market.

4. Promote, develop and communicate key media messages focusing on the value of children, maternity, paternity and families in our communities and societies.

5. Develop, promote and communicate the economic and social value of family-friendly workplaces in accordance with comprehensive systems of accreditation.

6. Enhance dialogue and partnerships between social policy makers and relevant stakeholders, including families, family associations, business sector, trade unions and employers to develop and improve family-friendly policies and practices in the workplace.

7. Support and promote a stronger, integrated, accessible and supported framework to enhance lone parents' opportunities to balance work and family life and therefore fully engage in education, skill development and job advancement.

8. Recognize and communicate the social, economic and cultural value of family care work.

9. Offer and promote a variety of care practices and opportunities to enable families to make choices (e.g. regarding childcare arrangements), according to their parental responsibilities, needs and values.